



BOOK REVIEW

Moshe Schein, A companion to aphorisms & quotations for the surgeon. TFM Publishing Ltd, 2008, £20.00, 216pp.

Reviewing books to write an opinion is an interesting phenomenon. A challenging project would be to analyze how the selling of books is influenced by such reviews. Perhaps very positive ones do increase the readership but perhaps also very negative ones do. It is nice to make up your own opinion. When you have a textbook you can list certain criteria such as coverage, scientific contents, illustrations etc., which make the book of interest. When you have a novel you can list other criteria which more has to do with fiction, aesthetics etc. But how do you judge a book titled "A companion to aphorisms & quotations for the surgeon", edited by Moshe Schein? How can I start better than to borrow one of the quotations from the book – "the only one benefited by the writing of books is the one who writes them ... but the financial compensation in medical writing is a negligible quantity." Now Moshe Schein has not written a book but collected some 600 quotations and how it will influence his financial situation I do not know, but for sure it has benefited me reading all the wisdom and remarks he has brought together to quite a valuable volume. You can read and enjoy it for yourself, you can borrow from it when you are going to give lectures or after dinner speeches, and you can put up quotations on your wall or refrigerator door to remind that there is a lot of thinking in relation to our job as craftsmen. Or what about this one for a vascular surgeon "Surgical amputation of a limb is the most philosophical work of all human sciences, Pierre Dufouart 1737–1813."? This is indeed practical philosophy, but today we have climbed to the higher area of theoretical philosophy, where reconstructing blood flow and function

is the guiding principle – *panta rei*. Or – to borrow another quotation – as Leo Gordon puts it: "Surgery is both art and science. The science is pretty straight forward. The art influences the discipline in many ways, some of which border on the mystical."

Surgery is certainly the number one speciality within the medical realm, vascular surgery being the shining diamond recognized as an own speciality in an increasing number of countries. Knowing this fact it may, however, be of value to remember the Nobel Laureate Theodor Kocher's word that "a good surgeon is a doctor who can operate and knows when not to operate". And for those of us who are in Academia the opposite is also important to remember, formulated by Mary J Wilson, that "a poor surgeon hurts one person at a time. A poor teacher hurts 130." Having just written a chapter on aneurysmal history and about to retire I got somewhat depressed reading Leo A Gordon's statement: "When I was younger, I always told residents that the first sign of senility in a surgeon is when he demonstrates an interest in surgical history". With this knowledge I realized that my senility started quite long ago. Otherwise I greatly appreciated reading this book and getting the opportunity to reflect on both the wisdom and the fun, which Moshe Schein has put together for us.

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